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“Comprehensive Evaluation” as One of the Tools for Assessing Teachers in Secondary Technical Schools in Socialist Czechoslovakia*

Keywords: secondary technical education, teacher, comprehensive evaluation, Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovakia

Summary

This study explores the system of teacher evaluation in secondary technical schools in socialist Czechoslovakia, focusing on the practice known as “Comprehensive Evaluation” (*Komplexní hodnocení*). Drawing on oral history interviews with former teachers and analysis of personnel documents of the period, the article reconstructs the role of political ideology in teacher assessments during the normalization period (1969–1989). The findings demonstrate that evaluations were not primarily concerned with pedagogical performance but were deeply embedded in the ideological objectives of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Teachers were assessed according to their political loyalty, participation in socialist organizations, and compliance with ideological expectations, in addition to their teaching effectiveness.

“Visaptveroša vērtēšana” kā viens no rīkiem skolotāju novērtēšanas sistēmā sociālistiskās Čehoslovākijas tehniskajās vidusskolās

Atslēgas vārdi: vidējā tehniskā izglītība, skolotājs, visaptveroša vērtēšana, Čehoslovākijas Komunistiskā partija, Čehoslovākija

Kopsavilkums

Rakstā tiek pētīta skolotāju vērtēšanas sistēma sociālistiskās Čehoslovākijas tehniskajās vidusskolās, fokusējoties uz praksi, kas pazīstama kā “visaptveroša vērtēšana” (*Komplexní hodnocení*). Balstoties uz mutvārdu vēstures intervijām ar bijušajiem skolotājiem un šī perioda pedagogu uzskaites dokumentu analīzi, rakstā rekonstruēta politiskās ideoloģijas loma skolotāju vērtējumos “normalizācijas” periodā (1969–1989). Pētījuma rezultāti liecina, ka skolotāju novērtējumos svarīgākais nebija pedagoģiskais sniegums, bet gan viņu darbības atbilstība Čehoslovākijas Komunistiskās partijas ideoloģiskajiem mērķiem. Skolotājus vērtēja, ņemot vērā ne tikai viņu mācību darba efektivitāti, bet arī politisko lojalitāti,

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līdzdalību sociālistiskajās organizācijās un atbilstību kompartijas ideoloģiskajām nostādnēm.

Introduction

The communist government in the period of socialist Czechoslovakia perceived the work of teachers at all levels of the education system, as well as the teaching profession in general, as very important. The primary reason for this was not, as it might seem, a concern for the most effective promotion of the talents, development of abilities or skills of the students entrusted to them, but rather their ideological education. After all, as described, for example, by Zounek, Šimáně and Knotová (2017), teachers were perceived literally as an ideological tool of the ruling party, preparing future generations loyal to socialist ideas and the socialist society they were supposed to participate in building.

A certain loosening of the regime during the 1960s, culminating in the events of the Prague Spring and the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia (for more, see McDermott 2015; Bren 2010; Swain, Swain 1998; etc.), only reassured the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCZ) that the ideological aspect in education and training needed further strengthening. The reason was obvious: the effort to prevent a repetition of the events of 1968 through “proper upbringing and education”. Therefore, according to contemporary ideas, during the so-called normalisation period, which ended with the fall of communism during the Velvet Revolution in 1989 (see, e.g. Fawn 2000; Vaněk, Mücke 2016), the teachers were first and foremost to uncompromisingly stand on the side of socialism, to engage in school and beyond, to create socialist consciousness in both young and adult individuals. In general, they were supposed to form a value system in their students in line with the value system of the socialist society (Čepičková 1984).

In this context, the article aims to explore how the ideological control of the teaching profession was reflected in the practice of teacher evaluation, especially in the so-called comprehensive evaluations (*komplexní hodnocení*) kept in cadre files. The study is based on a combination of oral history interviews with former teachers of secondary technical schools in former Czechoslovakia and an analysis of preserved personnel documents. The methodological approach draws on oral history and the history of everyday life, which makes it possible to reconstruct both the formal mechanisms of control and the lived experience of the evaluated teachers.

Monitoring loyalty: the politics of teacher assessment

To control the activities of teachers, the representatives of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia used, of course, the School Inspectorate, which had operated in the territory of former Czechoslovakia under various names since the time of Maria Theresa in the 18th century. However, as Franc (1970), for example, notes, from 1948, the year in which the CPCZ seized all political and administrative power in Czechoslovakia, the ideological side of Marxism-Leninism emerged as more prominent in inspection activities. The extra-curricular activities of teachers also began

to be monitored much more closely. In addition, socialist school inspectors continued to scrutinize schools, for example, for compliance with CPCZ and government resolutions, the Ministry of Education regulations, and those of superior national committees. In general, the School Inspectorate was perceived by the communist regime as a significant means of raising the level of communist education, which was emphasized essentially until the Velvet Revolution in 1989 (see, e.g. Dubský 1976; Liška 1980; Čepičková 1984).

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SLIB

Slibuji, že budu vždy pracovat v zájmu dělnické třídy a uskutečňovat politiku Komunistické strany Československa. Budu věrný Československé socialistické republice a budu obhajovat a upevňovat její socialistické zřízení.

Slibuji, že budu zachovávat ústavu Československé socialistické republiky i ostatní zákony a právní předpisy, budu svědomitě plnit své povinnosti a pokyny vedoucích pracovníků a zachovávat mlčenlivost v pracovních věcech.

Budu podle zásad komunistické výchovy pěstovat v žácích lásku k socialistické vlasti. Povedu je k úctě k dělnické třídě a Komunistické straně Československa. Budu je vychovávat v duchu marxisticko-leninského světového názoru. Zavazuji se rozvíjet u mládeže internacionální citění a prohlubovat přátelství se socialistickými zeměmi, zejména se Sovětským svazem.

Jsem si vědom toho, že svým osobním životem, postoji a jednáním, účastí ve veřejném životě a vystupováním podstatně ovlivňuji jako socialistický učitel chování a jednání žáků i nejbližší veřejnost.

Při veškerém svém jednání budu mít na zřeteli prospěch Československé socialistické republiky a jejího lidu.

Jsem si vědom důsledků, které by pro mne vyplynuly z neplnění slibu.

V 31.8.1983
podpis

Figure 1. (Teacher) oath (Source: Private document of the respondent Maria)

The work of the School Inspectorate in schools was, however, only one aspect of controlling the work of teachers. In the communist era, teachers were evaluated not only concerning the course of teaching, the fulfilment of pedagogical documentation, etc. The ideological aspect of their work also played a significant role in their evaluation. In this respect, the evaluation could also take on more serious features because, as Čepičková (1984) stated in her article, “[Socialist] society does not leave it up to the individual teachers how they perform their profession, how they fulfil their social and professional roles. Society verifies whether a teacher fulfils their expectations by checking and evaluating the results of the school’s work, and, therefore, by evaluating the teacher’s work” (p. 86). For that reason, a personnel file,

the so-called cadre file, was kept for each teacher at the school. That could contain several personal materials about the teacher. For example, a signed (teacher's) oath (see Figure 1), a statement from the college from which the teacher had graduated before joining the school system, the teacher's handwritten curriculum vitae, salary proposals, a personal questionnaire, and especially the so-called comprehensive evaluation and the conclusions of the comprehensive evaluation or other less important documents.

The most significant documents in the personnel files were comprehensive evaluations. Those were usually conducted every two years, as is evident from the documents (comprehensive evaluations) kept by some respondents. However, from time to time, as in the case of teacher Maria, there may have been an “update” of the comprehensive evaluation even after one year since the last evaluation. In her case, that update highlighted her pedagogical achievements that went beyond her teaching duties.

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KOMPLEXNÍ HODNOCENÍ

1974-1976

pravidelné za období

mimořádné

Hodnocený pracovník: (titul, jméno, příjmení)	Sociální původ: dělnický
Narozen:	Politická příslušnost: KSČ
Rodinný stav:	Změna v členství KSČ:
Nejvyšší ukončené vzdělání a praxe:	Pracoviště:
Dosažené politické vzdělání (absolvované školení): základní stranické vzdělání	Funkční zařazení: učitelka
V současné době studuje:	Státní a ministerská vyznamenání: vzorná učitelka
Členství ve společenských organizacích: RCH, SČSP, ČSŽ	Datum předcházejícího hodnocení: 1. října 1974
Zařazení v plánu kádrových rezerv dnem	Jméno a funkce hodnotitele:

1. Plnění závěrů posledního hodnocení:

Závěry z minulého komplexního hodnocení splnila, což se projevilo v prohloubení politicko-výchovné činnosti ve výuce.

V rámci svého bydliště pracuje ve funkci jednatelky ČSŽ.

Figure 2. Comprehensive evaluation - opening page¹ (Source: Private document of the respondent Štěpánka)

¹ The first page of the evaluation form contains basic personal and political data about the evaluated teacher, such as name, social background (in this case: working class), date of birth, marital status, political affiliation (Communist Party of Czechoslovakia), political education, workplace, current studies, state and ministerial awards (here: “Exemplary Teacher”), and membership in social organizations (here: Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, Union of Czechoslovak – Soviet Friendship, Czech Union of Women). It also includes information on whether the teacher is listed in the cadre

Specifically, this addendum included recognition of her students' success in a national competition called *Young Fashion Maker*, or recognition of her interest in holding various extracurricular activities with her students and, last but not least, a recommendation to continue with these activities because they “enrich with new knowledge and experience and contribute significantly to bringing the class together and improving their performance”.² The content of the comprehensive evaluation was the same for all teachers. There were even official forms for them (see Figure 2). However, the comprehensive evaluation could, as is evident from some private documents of the respondents, be written on a typewriter and not on a pre-printed form. The structure and individual points of the comprehensive evaluation were important. Interestingly, the content – the number of comprehensive evaluation points that the evaluators had to comment on – narrowed over time.

That is also recalled by Jakub, who showed me an example of one comprehensive evaluation from the 1970s during our interview: “This [comprehensive evaluation] is still from the time when individual categories, the areas of diligence evaluation and so on were divided. That later on was just summarized into these more formal formulations.” From the original three- to four-page text typical of the 1970s, the comprehensive evaluation took up just under two pages of text in the early 1980s. In addition, from the mid-1980s onwards, instead of implementing a new comprehensive evaluation, a variant was adopted in which only a so-called “monitoring of the conclusions” of the comprehensive evaluation was carried out. In other words, two years after the last comprehensive evaluation, the status of the teacher being evaluated was assessed, and, if there were no significant changes, only new tasks were set. In such cases, the comprehensive evaluation may have been barely half a page of text. It became a purely formal matter.

Despite the aforementioned changes in the scope of comprehensive evaluation, it kept several basic characteristics until the end of the communist period. In addition to providing basic information about the teacher, such as their name and degree, date of birth, nationality, marital status, name of the workplace, etc., the comprehensive evaluation (especially from the 1970s on) contained other varied information; for example, about social origin, political affiliation, political education, membership in social organizations (such as the Socialist Youth Union), information about any state and ministerial honours awarded, or whether the teacher is included in the cadre personnel reserve plan. All this essentially formed the header of the form and the first part of the entire document. Subsequently, however, the evaluators recorded other information in the document. Among the main ones was an item focusing on the teacher's compliance with the conclusions of the previous evaluation. Thus, the

personnel reserve and the name and position of the evaluator. The first section of the evaluation, “Fulfilment of conclusions of the previous evaluation,” reads: “She fulfilled the conclusions of the previous comprehensive evaluation, which was reflected in the deepening of her political-educational activities in teaching. In her place of residence, she works as secretary of the Czech Union of Women.

² The quote is from the document entitled *Supplement to the Comprehensive Evaluation*. This is material from the private archive of the teacher Maria, which is available to the author of this publication. To keep the respondent anonymous, more detailed information cannot be provided.

teacher's progress was generally assessed over the past two years, or since the last comprehensive evaluation. Another major item on the comprehensive evaluation was the teacher's overall political commitment assessment. For example, for Štěpánka, we would find in this context a mention of her service as a member of the Municipal National Committee in a medium-sized town within the former South Moravian Region. Similarly, in the case of Maria, we could read about her participation in the establishment of an independent group of the Socialist Youth Union at the school where she worked, etc.

Among the main points was the evaluation of work ability and work results. This point is also an example of the gradual simplification of the comprehensive evaluation. Originally, these were two separate points. It was also the first major point that began to address the pedagogical aspect of a teacher's performance in a given school. In the case of Maria, for example, this point came out very positively in one of her comprehensive evaluations. She was praised, for example, for creatively enriching the scope of her teaching activities at the school and transferring her high work ethic to the students. Another item of the comprehensive evaluation focused on the personality and personal qualities of the teachers. The completion of this item was probably conceptualized differently by the evaluators. For example, Maria's personality and personal qualities are mainly associated with her teaching activities, whereas for Štěpánka it is a list of more general characteristics; for example, being a person with a mild, honest and sociable character, who leads an orderly family life, etc.

The last major point in the comprehensive evaluation concerned health status. That was usually described very briefly. After the health evaluation, a conclusion followed. Brief in the 1980s, divided into several other points in the 1970s. For example, the evaluators had to decide whether the teachers being evaluated should stay in their current position or whether they should be reassigned to another position based on the results of the comprehensive evaluation. At the same time, various tasks were set for the next period. These concerned both work-related and political issues. In this context, for example, to continue the work of the cultural and political committee of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement's Factory Committee, as Marie had stated in her evaluation. In addition, the evaluators could continue with a proposal for upgrading qualifications or justifying a proposal for inclusion in the cadre personnel reserves. At the very end, the name of the evaluator, the opinion of the party body, e.g. the CPCZ Basic Committee or the CPCZ Basic Organisation, which was active in the vocational school in question, and the teacher's acquaintance with the result of the evaluation, which had to be confirmed by their approval and signature, were given.

And who were the evaluators? As it might seem, it was not the School Inspectorate staff but the school management. The comprehensive teacher evaluation was, therefore, carried out at the school either directly by the principal or by his/her deputy or another person authorised by the principal. However, school inspectors familiarised themselves with the cadre files during their inspection activities at the school to form a more comprehensive picture of the teacher they were, for example, observing. And as Jakub recalls: “Basically, if a person did not get into conflict with

the regime, it was just part of his personal file. But, according to that evaluation, he was paid in terms of bonuses... during that time, I never had the opportunity to meet someone being persecuted for his views. That it was declared as a reason for the termination of the employment contract. However, terminations of employment, I suppose, in those days, they wouldn't have openly presented the political justification; they would have certainly found practical, real, tangible things... they would have come up with other excuses. For example, failure to perform some duty. And those obligations could be related to that [undesirable] political activity.”

In such cases, the record of non-performance of duties would also be entered into the comprehensive evaluation. And that could subsequently, at any time, also become the basis for possible labour law proceedings against any teacher who, for whatever reasons, was questioned by the school management.

Conclusions

The normalization period in Czechoslovakia brought not only political stability for the ruling party but also a deepening of ideological control over the educational system. Secondary technical schoolteachers, like their colleagues at other levels, found themselves subject to a system of evaluation that extended far beyond the boundaries of professional performance. Through comprehensive evaluations, cadre files, and regular monitoring by school management, the state sought to ensure the ideological reliability of those entrusted with educating the young generation. These assessments, though sometimes formal or perfunctory, could shape careers, influencing everyday school life, and reflecting the changing political priorities of the regime. The stories preserved in personal documents and memories of former teachers reveal not only how this system worked in practice, but also how individuals navigated its demands – sometimes complying, sometimes quietly resisting, and always aware of being watched.

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³ The interviews and private materials of the respondents interviewed by the author of the study as a part of the project were used in this publication. The recordings and the private materials are stored in the project archive with the author of the study.

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